

Success Story

U.S. Small Business Administration
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More than A Sporting chance for Success!
Ron Hodgson: President/Owner
By: Robert McLoone, SBA

When Ron Hodgson, a long time resident of the area, first thought about going into business, he did not have to look very far. While his passion was in sports, he knew he needed far more than a dream and desire to get his business "off the ground." Ron has started several business before, all successful ,but nothing the magnitude of Sportsplex. As a result, he found himself looking to the local Small Business Development center for help. Partially funded by the SBA, the SBDC is a network of university and chamber of commerce based centers that provide free management, consulting and technical assistance to small business owners in a variety of areas.

Ron tried for several years to get funding through the banks but none of the banks wanted to take the risk on a start-up business and they were all turning him down. So, he turned to SBDC where they talked through his situation and reviewed his business plan and projections. The concept was good but needed some tweaking to make the banks more comfortable with the whole project.

After several meetings and counseling sessions, the SBDC then recommended the SBA 504 program. This program is one of the SBA's premier lending programs which allow the banks to reduce their risk while encouraging them to move forward with projects they may not otherwise consider, especially with start-up businesses. Ron loved the concept and he took the ball and ran with it, as is his nature. He approached his bank who agreed to fund the project but only if they could get a SBA 504 loan approval. The Business Finance Group, one of the SBA's top 504 Lenders in Virginia, agreed to fund the project.

Ron's dream was becoming realty. With hard work, persistence and dedication, the project was near completion and then, as Ron said, "it was like the lights came on". As soon as he had the SBA 504 loan approved the project, the doors opened, a number of banks all sought him out to offer him a loan. He sat down with his bank, First Bank, and they presented him with a proposal to finance the whole deal without the SBA. As Ron put it, "I never would have realized my dream if it wasn't for the help I got from the SBDC and the getting the loan approved form the SBA under he 504 loan program."

The Sportsplex strives to offer a great facility, in a pleasant environment, to play and watch a variety of activities in a safe and wholesome environment. At the Sportsplex, their motto is "We believe in youth sports" and they have exactly what you need to make any event a hit. While the facilities are fun filled accommodations to keep kids busy and let you relax, it also provides mom and dad with the chance to get involved as well.

According to Ron, over 450,000 visitors came to the Sportsplex last year. They not only have a variety of sporting events for all ages including basketball, volleyball, soccer, hockey, lacrosse, flag football, they also have fitness facilities and batting cages as well as gymnastics and tumbling areas. The Fitness Zone has state-of-the-art equipment and accommodations to get you in-shape and keeping your party busy won't be a problem either. The Sportsplex has facilities and events for everyone to keep your event going all night long! They even have a roller skating rink and dodge ball, as well as Arcade and host the Lord Fairfax Community College 30' Climbing Wall, and Much More!

Located within the Sportsplex is Instant Replay Sports, a general sporting goods store specializing in fitness strength and cardio equipment, roller hockey, ski and snowboard equipment, kayak and paddle gear, baseball, softball, and lacrosse equipment.

Event planning is also one of their specialties. Offering over 30,000 square feet of exhibit and meeting space, the Sportsplex and Encore Special Events will host trade shows, company meetings, conferences, corporate retreats and retirement and wedding parties. Sportsplex also has rooms and space that will accommodate any group of 15 to 1,000 people. Encore and the Sportsplex can handle everything from casual picnics and barbecues to gourmet buffets and elegant sit down dinners. The spacious arenas, elaborate lighting and audiovisual capabilities allow for mega crowds to enjoy countless fundraisers, auctions and fashion shows, even a New Years Celebration and other events in comfort and style. It is truly that out of the extraordinary place for all seasons and all events, where you'll never have to worry about being rained out because of bad weather.

The Sportsplex has a State of the art arena with new astro-play turf which looks and plays just like real grass hosting sporting events for all ages, from little kickers to adults. Sportsplex is in the midst of its' biggest and best indoor soccer leagues for the winter season. This year W.I.S.L., Winchester Indoor Soccer League, has organized its youth soccer leagues for the Sportsplex. In addition the W.I.S., Youth Soccer Instructional Programs at the Sportsplex are designed to provide an introduction to soccer with a fundamental and fun approach. It's Soccer for the whole family.

The Sportsplex is truly a place for the whole family and once you've exhausted yourself at one of the numerous sporting activities, you can also enjoy Belen's Italian cuisine or enjoy a premium coffee and specialty drinks too at the Java Hut Coffee Espresso and Juice Bar.

"It's obvious that Ron Hodgson has put a lot of hard work into his dream, giving the Sportsplex more than a sporting chance at Success", say Ron Bew, District Director of the U.S. Small Business Administration Richmond District Office.

Some advice Ron give to any entrepreneur is to never give up on your dream, don't get discouraged by people who are negative, be able to adapt to changes i.e. business plan, do a lot of research prior to your commitment. Ron I visited over 100 similar facilities prior to committing, don't reinvent the wheel. Look at other similar projects and make yours better. And most of all being willing to work hard and love what you are doing. Never think of your project as a job or work, it's your passion, your love. It's not always about the money. Money, profit, is a bi-product of proper planning, commitment, providing a need in your community and labor of your passion."

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